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# The Gull

Golden Gate Audubon Society Newsletter  
Volume 77 • No. 8 September 1995

## GGAS Presents Elsie Roemer Conservation Awards

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Elsie Roemer was one of our Chapter's most ardent battlers for wildlife conservation, dedicating her life to preserving wetlands in Alameda. In recognition of her efforts (which, in part, resulted in the creation of the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary) GGAS created the Elsie Roemer Award which is presented to both chapter members and to non-chapter individuals who have demonstrated unusual resolve and activism in the defense of our natural world.

In a year in which it appears that the environment is under attack from all sides (Governor Wilson exempts essentially everything from the California Endangered Species Act, Congress removes all funding for EPA enforcement of the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts and threatens to eviscerate both of those Acts, etc.) it is heartening to see that many of our GGAS members are stepping up their efforts to preserve our threatened wildlife resources.

This year we celebrate the efforts of two Golden Gate Audubon members, John Bowers and Steve Granholm, by awarding them the Elsie Roemer Conservation Award for 1994/95. We also take particular pleasure in giving the Elsie Roemer Conservation Award to Ruth Pratt a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

John Bowers, a long-time GGAS member, despite holding down a full-time job (he's a lawyer with the California Coastal Commission) and helping care for a new-born child, has found the time to take on two issues dear to GGAS.

Lake Merritt, designated a State Waterfowl Refuge in 1870, was the first legislated wildlife refuge in the nation! The late Paul Covell, a previous Elsie Roemer Conservation Award recipient and GGAS member, was Lake Merritt's Lakeside

Park's first Naturalist, and Paul monitored and cared for the Refuge after his retirement. John Bowers has now stepped in to help insure that the heritage between Lake Merritt and GGAS goes unbroken. John has been working hard to ensure that the 125th year celebration of Lake Merritt has a wildlife perspective. Many hours of meetings go into this effort. John is also working hard in an attempt to get a wetlands restoration project underway in the Lake and, to forward this effort, John has become a Board Member of the Lake Merritt Institute, an organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the natural qualities of Lake Merritt.

John has also taken an active role in our attempt to establish an Alameda National Wildlife Refuge on the closing Alameda Naval Air Station. Using his lawyerly skills John has spent countless hours reading and responding to proposed federal regulations concerning base closure in an attempt to keep the U.S. Navy on the right track. John has also attended many meetings at the Bay Conservation and Development Commission's (BCDC's) Seaport Planning process. His efforts here have been to head off a Seaport Plan recommending that container terminals be built on the Air Station. Such terminals would not be good neighbors to the nesting Least Terns since the cranes would provide excellent roosting sites for peregrine falcons and other raptors which would just love to feed on newborn Least Tern chicks. We are pleased to say that John has been at least partially successful in these efforts and in the fall, when BCDC releases an Environmental Assessment on the Seaport Plan, John will have further opportunities to educate them. We can't thank John enough for the tremendous investment of time he has put into these issues.

Steve Granholm, another long-time GGAS member and co-author of "Discovering Sierra Birds" (published by The Yosemite Association), works full-time as a principal biological consultant in a major environmental consulting firm and is the father of eight year-old Julia. Yet, he too has somehow found time to play a critical role in GGAS's efforts to preserve our wildlife resources. When CALTRANS was proposing major expansion of the I-80 freeway between Richmond and the Bay Bridge, Steve realized that there might be major impacts on shorebird roosting sites. Roosting sites are the places shorebirds go to rest when their mudflat feeding grounds are covered by high tides or during storms. Such sites, critical elements in the life of a shorebird, are becoming disturbingly rare as we humans pave over historic roosting sites or put trails right next to them.

Recognizing this possible impact, Steve organized a volunteer censusing program that identified important roosting sites along this stretch of the Bay. Many hours went into this effort, but the results were tremendous. The study revealed never-before-suspected roosting sites. This information has proved invaluable in helping to preserve these sites. This field work also produced unexpected benefits by identifying previously unknown Clapper Rail habitat. Again, this knowledge has proved invaluable. When the East Bay Regional Park District proposed improving the trail between Point Isabel and Richmond's Marina Cove housing, Steve's census information and the several walks he took with BCDC staff (BCDC had to approve a Park District permit application to improve the trail) helped us convince BCDC and the Park District to put in plantings and fencing that will screen Clapper Rails from human disturbance and protect them from dogs and cats.

Steve has also spent many an evening going to meetings as a member of the City of Albany's Waterfront Committee. The City of Albany will play an important role in deciding the future of its shoreline as it comments on both the Eastshore State Park implementation process and on CALTRANS' I-80

widening project. Steve is working hard to ensure that the Waterfront Committee incorporates wildlife habitat preservation in its end product. The Waterfront Committee is also responsible for determining the alignment of the Bay Trail through Albany and Steve will do his best to see that the Bay Trail is aligned so as to not disrupt critical shorebird habitat.

Finally, Steve is the GGAS office's indispensable resource whenever I have questions on shorebirds, waterfowl or any other conservation/biological issue. Our Bay's avian resources owe Steve a vote of thanks for his efforts on their behalf.

Speaking of avian resources, our third Elsie Roemer Conservation Award winner, Ruth Pratt, has dedicated her life to preserving the habitat of our Bay Area waterfowl and shorebirds. It has become the in-thing to poke fun at government employees and to blame them for the ills of the nation. But in the world of natural resource conservation, we have few better allies and no more dedicated workers than those who work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Ruth Pratt exemplifies that dedication. Twelve years ago, when people questioned the importance of seasonal wetlands, Ruth Pratt recognized their importance and organized a volunteer diked-baylands census program. That five-year program created the only definitive body of information on seasonal wetlands and it clearly illustrates the great value of these historic diked baylands to shorebirds, waterfowl and many other avian and mammalian species. Using this information, Ruth has been one of the few agency personnel with the courage to stand up to powerful development forces in order to defend our seasonal wetlands. There would be many fewer wetlands in the Bay Area were it not for Ruth Pratt.

In recent years Ruth has again been on the cutting edge of resource preservation issues, this time concerning the conflict between public access and waterbird habitat. More and more scientific data has been collected that demonstrates that human disturbance can greatly alter bird behavior. Studies have shown that wetlands with adjacent

trails have up to 50% fewer waterfowl than wetlands without trails. Other studies have shown that even if birds do not flush when disturbed, they feed 50% less of the time because they are constantly looking up at the humans walking by. This loss of feeding time can be critical to migrating birds and can result in their death during their long migratory flights or in a non-productive breeding season (lack of calories evidently reduces fertility.)

When CALTRANS proposed altering the I-80/I-580 interchange next to the Albany mudflats, we were shocked to learn that the Bay Trail proponents, including the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, wanted to put the Bay Trail right next to the mudflats. Indeed, in some cases the trail would be only a few feet from the water. Yet these mudflats are one of the richest shorebird and waterfowl feeding habitats in the Central Bay rivaled only by the Emeryville Crescent marsh. A trail immediately next to the mudflats would certainly affect avian use of those mudflats.

Ruth recognized the tremendous impacts that would result from the creation of this trail and she worked hard to get it to take another alignment. While she was unsuccessful in this effort, as were we, she was successful in altering the design of the trail and it will now have a solid barrier on the bayside that will help screen the wildlife from people walking on the trail. Ruth took a lot of heat from other agencies and public officials who simply wanted to get the whole thing over with and didn't understand what all the fuss was about, but she persevered and thanks to her efforts the Mudflats may remain a wonderful wildlife resource. It takes guts and dedication to be a Ruth Pratt; we are thankful she lives and works in the Bay Area.

The Conservation Awards will be presented on September 14, at our monthly meeting in Berkeley (see Back Page for further information). Please join us in honoring these three worthy recipients.

*Arthur Feinstein*

## PANAMA COMMITTEE

PanCom continues to assist the Panama Audubon Society in its plan to inform and mobilize its public on environmental issues and the preservation of their vital forests. The following committee actions should help toward that goal:

- Dan Evans, Executive Director of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, has agreed to be the keynote speaker for Panama Audubon Society's three-day International Bird Festival in October.
- Additional binoculars have been collected.
- Committee members are completing an itinerary for their educational fund-raising Panama trip. With firsthand information, additional trips will be designed to raise money and promote eco-tourism.

Panama came to life for committee members at our May and June meetings with the delightful visits of Leopoldo Richard and Puksu Igualikinya, two Kuna Indians from the San Blas Islands. They shared customs, folk tales, and their determination to protect their land which is threatened by development.

The next PanCom meeting will be September 11th at 7:30 pm. Call Miles or Mary Ellen McKey for details: (510) 652-5854.

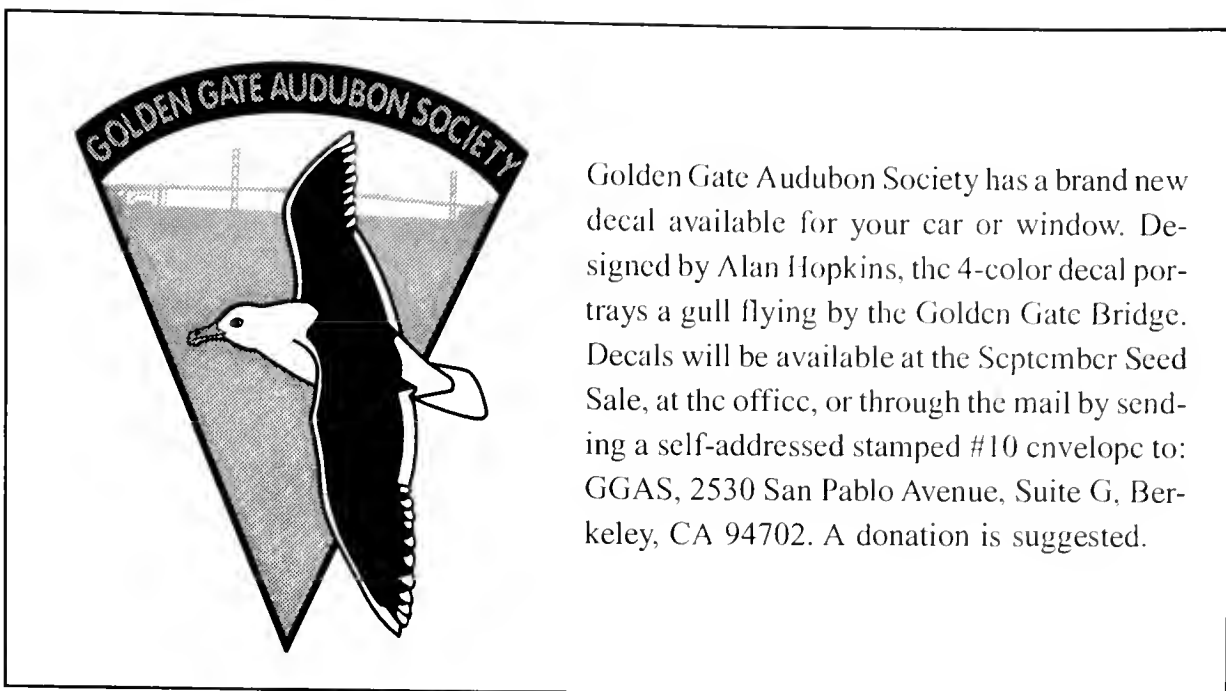
**Note: We urgently need the name of anyone who will repair binoculars without charge for this great cause! Please call Miles with any ideas you might have.**

*Jean Lucken*

## CONFESSIONS OF A CHICKADEE CLUB LEADER

To be honest, I volunteered as a Chickadee trip leader out of a sense of duty, and while I wasn't exactly dreading my time with the kids, I did face it with some trepidation and without 100% enthusiasm.

I believe that nature education for today's children is an investment in the future. They are the ones who will, in a few years, make decisions about the environment even more crucial than the ones we are making now and if they value the natural world they are more likely to make decisions which are good for the



Golden Gate Audubon Society has a brand new decal available for your car or window. Designed by Alan Hopkins, the 4-color decal portrays a gull flying by the Golden Gate Bridge. Decals will be available at the September Seed Sale, at the office, or through the mail by sending a self-addressed stamped #10 envelope to: GGAS, 2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702. A donation is suggested.

earth and the universe. If they've never had a chance to explore or learn about nature, it is less likely to have value to them. It was this belief more than my enthusiasm about being with children, which is usually limited to my grandchildren and sometimes even excludes them, that motivated my willingness to take part in a Chickadee Club field trip.

Six Chickadees and their parents gathered in the parking lot at Berkeley Marina the morning of our field trip. After we introduced ourselves, some of the kids shyly hiding behind their mom or dad and using voices we could barely hear, we walked down to the beach for some "bird" games. Shyness was forgotten as the Chickadees fought over who would be the hawk in our first game and we had to settle the argument by drawing straws. At the end of the game, some kids didn't want to take off the "feathers" they had worn for it and left them on for the rest of the morning. Children and adults alike were fascinated seeing the "zippers"

on feathers by viewing them through the magnifying glass. Peter and his dad brought their own scope and after we set it up in the sand, everyone got some really good close-up looks at the shorebirds and watched them getting their breakfast before we walked over to the pier.

Some parents were quite knowledgeable and well-informed about birds; others were there only because their child wouldn't have been able to come otherwise. But their presence made a big difference in how much enjoyment I had. I had to remind myself several times that it was not my responsibility to keep these kids out of the water or the trees or other trouble -- each one had an adult along to take care of that kind of thing.

When the morning ended, I was surprised to realize how much I had enjoyed our field trip and how much I had learned about doing the next one which I was, this time, looking forward to with enthusiasm.

*Ruby Long*

## VOLUNTEERS WANTED

**Chickadee Club:** introduce small groups of young elementary school students and their parents to local East Bay habitats and bird life. (See article above.) Contact John Poole for information: (510) 549-0784.

**Snowy Plover Censusers:** GGNRA's annual monitoring program for the Western Snowy Plover is looking for people interested in observing this threatened shorebird on S.F.'s Ocean Beach. Requires commitment of at least 4 hours every 2 weeks. There will be a training session. Call Nola Chow at (415) 331-0744 for more information.

**Bay Shore Studies Volunteer:** series of 14 Friday classes beginning September 15 providing background information and training on the ecology of SF Bay preparatory to leading small groups of 4th-8th grade students on Bay Shore Studies field trips. Sponsored by Richardson Bay Audubon Center. Call Meryl Sundove at (415) 388-2525 for more information.

# Field Trips Calendar

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## **Saturday, September 9**

### **Coastal San Francisco**

Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot between South and Middle Lakes (Chain of Lakes) near the 41st Ave. and Lincoln Way entrance to Golden Gate Park. We will bird in the park, Lake Merced, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in search of warblers, flycatchers, and vagrants (the feathered kind). Bring a lunch and be prepared for cold weather near the coast. Leader: Dan Murphy (415) 564-0074. (\*)

## **Wednesday, September 13**

### **Mini-trip to Alameda South Shore and surrounding areas**

Meet at 9 a.m. in Alameda at Broadway and Shoreline Drive. We will be looking for shorebirds and waterfowl. Last year our observations included a Merlin, Snowy Plovers, and a Parasitic Jaeger. Bring lunch and a scope if you have one. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301, and Jean-Marie Spoelman.

## **Sunday, September 17**

### **San Mateo Coast**

Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot of San Gregorio State Beach (near the junction of Hwy. 1 and Hwy. 84). We will bird at Pescadero in the morning and at Ano Nuevo in the afternoon. We will look for migrants and shorebirds in the mudflats, plus Pectoral and Baird's sandpipers and tattlers and knots. We may also see Marbled Murrelets at Ano Nuevo. Bring lunch and a light jacket. Leader: Alan Hopkins (415) 664-0983. (\$) (\*)

## **Saturday, September 23**

### **Point Reyes National Seashore**

Meet at 8 a.m. at Five Brooks Trail-head parking lot, approx. 3.5 miles south of Olema on the west side of Hwy. 1. We will bird the Five Brooks Pond area and Limantour Spit, concentrating mostly on migrating songbirds. Trip will end about 1 p.m. Lunch optional. Leader: Nikhil Kumaranayagam (510) 704-8168 (\*)

## **Saturday, October 7**

### **Presidio, Lincoln Park, and Cliff House**

Meet at 9 a.m. in the Merrie Way parkin lot (off Pt. Lobos Ave. above the Cliff House). We will check the prime spots along the San Francisco north shore for migrating seabirds, flycatchers and warblers. Bring lunch and be prepared for cold weather. Leader: Alan Hopkins 415) 664-0983

## **Wednesday, October 11**

### **Mini-trip to East Bay shoreline**

Meet at 9:15 a.m. From Hwy. 80 in Emeryville, take Powell St. exit and go west. Meet at the north end of the parking lot by the Holiday Inn. We will be looking for shorebirds and whatever else shows up. (Last year our observations included Whimbrels, Black Turnstones, and a Glaucous-winged Gull.) Lunch optional. Rain cancels trip. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301, and Jean Marie Spoelman.

## **Saturday, October 14**

### **Pt. Diablo, Golden Gate Nat'l. Recreation Area, Marin Co.**

Meet at 10 a.m. at the middle platform of Hawk Hill, where we will watch for migrating hawks and landbirds until 2 p.m.

From San Francisco, drive north across the Golden Gate Bridge and take Alexander Ave. exit. Turn left as if returning to San Francisco, drive under the freeway and bear to the right. Go up to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area; continue (past the intersection with a road coming up from Rodeo Valley) to the large tunnels on the right, just before the road narrows and becomes one-way. Park and walk up the trail to the left of the second tunnel. We will bird from the middle platform observation point.

Rain cancels and meeting place may be changed due to fog. Watch for signs at the access gate to Hawk Hill. Bring lunch and liquids. Sun screen, a hat, and a wind-breaker may be advisable. Leader: Alan Fish (415) 331-0730.

**Trips marked with \$** go to parks and other sites that require an entrance fee.

**Carpooling** arrangements will be attempted for trips marked (\*). See below.

**Problems:** If you need a ride or can take a passenger, or if you need information and have difficulty reaching a field trip leader, call Russ Wilson, Field Trips Committee Chair, (510) 524-2399, or the GGAS office (510) 843-2222.

## **BIRDING CLASSES IN S.F.**

Joe Morlan will again be offering three separate field ornithology classes (each comprised of two 7-week sessions) through the San Francisco Community College District. Classes meet in Room 222 at Marina Middle School, 3500 Fillmore at Bay St., from 7 - 9:30 p.m.. There is free parking in the school lot.

**Tuesday** nights (Field Ornithology I) are an introduction to birds and birding, combining basic field skills with the study of bird ecology, biology, and behavior. First meeting: September 12. **Wednesday and Thursday** nights (Field Ornithology II and III) are continuing, species-by-species discussions, Wednesdays starting with gamebirds, pigeons, cuckoos, owls and nightjars; Thursdays continuing with waterbirds, including seabirds, cormorants, herons and waterfowl. First meetings: September 6 and 7.

There are slides aplenty and lively discussions add spice to the evenings. Many of the best birders in the Bay Area are graduates of Joe's classes and we can't recommend them highly enough.

Cost per 7-week session for each class is \$75. For further information, call the S. F. Community College Continuing Education Office at (415) 561-1840 or (415) 267-6545.





# Observations: June 7 - July 21

Daniel Singer

## LOONS TO DUCKS

The **Arctic Loon** at Bodega Bay, SON, was reported off and on through June 18 (JH). An adult Little Blue Heron was in Alviso, SCL, July 3-4 (PJM, MiF). This species nested in the area last year. Clearly not ready for the breeding season was the lingering **Emperor Goose** which hung around Bodega, SON, until at least June 6 (m.ob.). Northern Shoveler and Gadwall provided first county nesting records for Contra Costa at Shell Marsh in Martinez June 30 (SGI). The three summering Oldsquaws remained at Princeton harbor, SM, through at least July 6 (m.ob.). A Barrow's Goldeneye was at the mouth of Pine Gulch Creek in Bolinas, MRN, July 7 (CCo). This species is unheard of in summer in recent times except for three records from Tule Lake N.W.R., SIS, between 1988-1992. Barrow's Goldeneyes formerly bred in the Cascades and Sierras, but there appears to be no evidence of this since 1934. A Red-breasted Merganser provided a rare summer record for Mono Lake, MNO, June 10 (fide ES).

## CRANES TO ALCIDS

The Sandhill Crane at Bodega Bay remained through June 24 (m.ob.), and was observed vying for handouts with the gulls at the Tides Wharf Restaurant. The southbound passage of shorebirds begins in earnest towards the end of June. The few reports so far are mostly from the Southbay and include Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes.

Unseasonal gull reports included a Mew Gull from SCL on July 3 (PJM) and Herring Gulls on June 11 (BMcK) and July 4 (RSTh) in SM.

A bird believed to be a hybrid **Sandwich X Elegant Tern** was at the Pajaro River mouth, MTY, July 4-11 (SFB, m.ob.). A Sandwich Tern nested this year with an Elegant at the tern colony at Bolsa Chica in Orange County. The first reports of southbound Common Terns included one from the Pajaro River mouth, MTY, on July 8 (RSTh) and

another in Pacifica, SM, July 10 (JM). Black Skimmers were reported by numerous observers from the Southbay where they are nesting for the second year in a row in SCL and possibly ALA. Lest one get the wrong impression, readers should be aware that there are far more observations than actual birds.

Ancient Murrelets were noted at Point Reyes, MRN, June 14 (RS) and off the Bodega headlands, SON, June 25 (JSL, JM, GMcC). Hearty souls aboard a Cordell Bank pelagic trip June 24 endured rough seas and few birds offshore, but were rewarded with a **Crested Auklet** (DLSh, SBT, CCo) just 100 yards off the Bodega Marine Lab in late afternoon. Efforts to relocate the auklet were unsuccessful, as the boatload of ever-hopeful birders who went out the next day can attest. The only prior state record was a beached bird at Bolinas in 1979.

## OWLS TO FLYCATCHERS

The Barred Owl was still present along Skaggs Springs Road near Stewarts Point, SON, through June 25 (m.ob.). San Mateo's Red-breasted Sapsuckers were feeding young along Butano Creek June 11 (BMcK).

A good variety of vagrant passerines were noted during June but the numbers were not impressive. A Cassin's Kingbird at Pt. Reyes, MRN, June 17 (KKw) isn't "eastern" in origin but is a vagrant along our coast nonetheless. Eastern Kingbirds are not necessarily "eastern" in origin either, but provide most birders more bang for their buck as a vagrant than the previous species. One was at Pt. Reyes June 10 (RS) and another was at San Rafael June 22 (KWe). Better yet was a **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** near the Pt. Cabrillo Lighthouse, MEN, June 26 which was joined by another June 28 (DT, fide RJK).

## VIREOS TO FINCHES

A singing Red-eyed Vireo was in Half Moon Bay, SM, June 8-9 (BS, RSTh). Eastern warblers in particular made a poor showing through the region with

only nine species of vagrants reported; nevertheless, what was lacking in quantity was offset somewhat by quality. Additional reports of Northern Parulas included a pair apparently nesting at Five Brooks, PRNS, June 17-27 (KKw, RS, JMR), two males and at least one female along Lagunitas Creek, MRN, June 24 (RS), and singles at the PRNS visitor's center July 8 (LHu), Half Moon Bay, June 18 (BS), and Fairhaven, HUM, June 29. Outer Point Reyes had a **Bay-breasted Warbler** June 9 (JHo) and a Blackpoll June 10 (SBT), while another Blackpoll was at Upper Crystal Springs Reservoir June 17 (BS). A Black-and-white Warbler was inland at Bethel Island, CC, June 9 (SGI). Reports of American Redstarts (all first-year males) include one from MON June 6 and two along Coyote Creek south of San Jose, SCL, July 1 - e.o.p. (SCR, m.ob.). From the "Flash Department" comes a **Prothonotary Warbler** along Cascade Creek, SM, June 18 (RSTh). Farther north a **Worm-eating Warbler**, one of our rarer vagrants, was found at Fairhaven, HUM, June 29 (SRo) and seen by several others through July 1. In coastal San Mateo five Yellow-breasted Chats observed between June 8-11 were more than usual, and an adult and two juveniles were along Coyote Creek in San Jose, July 11 (SCR).

Both reports of Summer Tanager were from SCL, with one along Mines Road June 15 (JM) considerably less expected than one along Coyote Creek, San Jose, June 17 (SCR). Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were well represented with eight reported between June 10 - July 9 from SF, SON, MRN, SM, CC, and MNO (m.ob.). A male Blue Grosbeak in El Granada, SM, July 13 (BS) was a good example of how early some passerines may start to move south. Single Indigo Buntings were at SON June 8 (RHw) and SM, July 14 and three were at the Redding sewage ponds, SHA, July 12-13 (BY). Much rarer was an apparent Lazuli X Indigo Bunting along Coyote Creek,

SCL, July 4 - e.o.p. (SCR). A Black Rosy-Finch, seen sporadically at Ellery Lake, MNO, between July 4 - July 23 (BGr, JSL, BBrr), frustrated many searchers. Birders can expect to see more records of this species as observers check rosy-finch flocks more diligently now that they have been re-split into three species.

The monthly observation column is generated from reports made to the Northern California Bird Box or to the author. Some sightings are unconfirmed and numbers of birds are often best regarded as estimates or "best guesses". In general, birds in boldface are very rare in our region, geographically or seasonally. Many of these are currently reviewed by the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC). Observers are encouraged to provide written and/or photographic documentation to the CBRC, c/o Michael Patten, P.O. Box 51959, Riverside, CA 92517-2959 for any species currently on the review list. A list of review species can also be obtained from the CBRC secretary at the address above.

**Observers:** Steve Bailey, Bruce Barrett, Ted Chandik, Les Chibana, Chris Corben, Al DeMartini, Al Eisner, Doug Ellis, Mike Feighner, Steve Glover, Betty Groce, Keith Hansen, Roger Harshaw, Rob Hewitt, Jim Holmes, Joel Hornstein, Lisa Hug, Robert Keiffer, Ted Koundakjian, Keith Kwan, Calvin Lou, John Luther, Guy McCaskie, Bert McKee, Peter Metropulos, Joe Morlan, Benjamin D. Parmeter, David Powell, Bob Reiling, Bob Richmond, Jean M. Richmond, Mike Rogers, Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Steve Rovell (SRo), Barry Sauppe, Doug Shaw (DSH), Debra Shearwater (DLSh), Dan Singer, Rich Stallcup, Emilie Strauss, Scott Terrill, Ron Thorn, Dorothy Tobkin, Alan Wight, Anna Wilcox (AWi), Bob Yutzy. Data thanks to Joe Morlan and the Northern California Bird Box.

**Abbreviations for counties:** ALA, Alameda; CC, Contra Costa; HUM, Humboldt; MRN, Marin; MEN, Mendocino; MER, Merced; MNO, Mono; MTY, Monterey; SCL, Santa Clara; SF, San Francisco; SHA, Shasta; SM, San Mateo; SON, Sonoma

## Back Yard Birder

Meg Pauletich

Bermuda is a pleasant place to visit, but I wouldn't like to live there! Not only is it a small island with multitudes of mopeds as well as taxis all driving on the "wrong" side of the road, it is expensive and has very few birds. There are the ubiquitous English [House] Sparrows and House Finches, Rock Doves, an occasional cardinal, and large numbers of handsome Great Kiskadees. Oddly, there were no shorebirds and I was told that the coral and limestone island has very few small invertebrates to attract shorebirds. There is supposed to be a small population of flamingoes, but they were not in evidence, leading me to believe they only winter in Bermuda. The White-tailed Tropicbird is the most strikingly obvious feathered beauty. From my hotel balcony, they endlessly wheeled gracefully as they flew back and forth across the opening to a small bay, constantly calling to one another. Several pairs performed beautiful shadow dances, moving effortlessly together as one, on obvious courtship display.

Tropicbirds are in the order Pelicaniformes, along with pelicans, cormorants, gannets, boobies, and frigatebirds. They are the only birds which share a totipalmate foot, one on which all 4 toes on each foot, including the hind one, are united by a web of skin. This ancient group of birds all stem from cormorant-like birds found 100 million years ago. They have short legs and big wings, meaning that they are fine fliers and can swim well but are very awkward while walking. Tropicbirds' legs are so far back they literally crawl on their bellies.

From a distance, tropicbirds most resemble terns: their flight is similar as is their hovering over their prey. They spot

fish, squid or crabs, then dive down, sometimes spiraling before diving beneath the water, snagging dinner in their sharp, down-curved orangish bills. These birds are numerous where they nest in small colonies, as on Bermuda. But at sea they are solitary; they fly many miles for food, since fish concentrations are poor in tropical waters.

The tropicbird family is called Phaethontidae after Phaeton, son of Helios, the sun god in Greek mythology. Phaeton drove his father's sun chariot across the skies. The White-tailed Tropicbird is the smallest in the family, at about 16" long with an equally long pair of central tail feathers. Their wingspread is about 36" and the adults show a black stripe along their wings and outer primaries. Their shrill, piping calls earned them the nickname of "bosunbirds," recalling a boatswain's whistle to pipe guests aboard a ship. Another common name for them is "marlinspike," because the long tail feathers resemble that fishermen's tool. Tropicbirds nest, if you can call it that, on cliffs where a single egg is laid sans nesting material in a crevice, cave, hole in the ground, or under grass and shrubbery.

There are 2 other birds in this family, and all 3 are seen occasionally along our Pacific coast. They are generally found in tropical oceans such as the Indian, Caribbean, or around the Hawaiian Islands.

Without my bird resource books, I had to wait till my return to read up on tropicbirds. My first reaction was to place them as members of the tern family, but hunches are not always accurate. Now all of us are "up to speed" on this beautiful bird.



Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary commemorative license plates featuring a Sea Otter lying on a bed of kelp with the Big Sur cliffs in the background can now be ordered. Cost is \$50 above normal registration fees the first year and \$40 each additional year. Fees generated in excess of printing costs are divided between the

Sanctuary's education and information programs and the California environmental license plate fund. Application forms are available from DMV and CSAA offices as well as from AMBAG at (408) 883-3750, (408) 883-3755 (fax), or P.O. Box 809, Marina, CA 93933-0809. 5000 paid orders must be received before DMV will print.

**September Meeting: Trinidad and Tobago**  
**Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda, Berkeley**  
**Thursday, September 14, 7:30 p.m.**

Spend an evening with Jimm Edgar visiting Trinidad and Tobago, islands at the southern end of the West Indies just 7 miles off the coast of Venezuela, which offer a variety of habitats and a diverse flora and fauna. Trinidad, which is 60 miles x 30 miles and Tobago, just 15 miles x 4 miles, are marvelous places for tropical birding, with over 400 species of birds and 600 species of butterflies. Birds of note include the Scarlet Ibis, which roosts by the thousands in Coroni Swamp, motmots, trogons, honey creepers and many more. Trinidad is perhaps the best place in the world to see the strange and elusive nocturnal Oilbird which is resident in Dunstan Cave. The Asa Wright Nature Center, located at 1200' in the 3000' Northern range on Trinidad, is an excellent base of operation with world-famous hospitality.

Jimm Edgar is the past president of Mt. Diablo Audubon Society and has been the compiler for their Christmas Count for over 10 years. He is the Associate Regional director of Young Life.

**TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO NEXT APRIL -- GGAS PLANS TRIP**

Would you like to see what might just be the world's cutest bird, the Tufted Coquette? How about a visit to the Oilbird colony in Dunstan Cave and a boat ride through the Caroni Swamp at sunset to watch the mangroves fill up with Scarlet Ibises? Then join Lina Jane Prairie on a nine-day GGAS-sponsored trip to Trinidad and Tobago in April, 1996.

Nearly all of the colorful and interesting families of neotropical birds can be found on Trinidad and Tobago, including beautiful hummingbirds, manakins, motmots, tanagers, toucans and trogons. But the number of species in each family is not overwhelming, as it is at many birding destinations in Central and South America. This makes for an excellent introduction to neotropical birding. To assist you in preparing for the trip, Lina Prairie and Steve Margolin will meet with trip participants several weeks before departure, to offer tips on tropical birding and Trinidad and Tobago bird identification, as well as an overview of neotropical bird taxonomy.

We will stay for five nights at the famed Asa Wright Nature Center in Trinidad and for three nights at the Blue Waters Inn on the Atlantic coast of Tobago. The accommodations (all with private bath) are very comfortable and the food very good. The price should be under \$2,000 per person, double occupancy, including meals and round trip airfare from San Francisco.

A detailed itinerary will be available at the September general meeting, or you may send a written request, including your mailing address and the number of people interested in the trip, to the GGAS office.

**ROSTER**

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**Weekly Rare Bird Summary**  
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5 species of loon have been seen in California

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**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

As a member of National Audubon Society, you are automatically enrolled in the local chapter, Golden Gate Audubon Society. Chapter benefits include receipt of *The Gull*, access to field trips and programs, and the opportunity to volunteer. Call the office if you have any questions.

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